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Tim W Hayes 03/02/2007 04:19:38 PM From DB/Inbox: Tim W Hayes

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Text:

C O N F I D E N T I A L                    ANKARA 00338

SIPDIS

CX:

ACTION: POL  
INFO: CONS TSR PMA ECON DCM AMB RAO FCS PA MGT DAO

DISSEMINATION: POL /1

CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: POL:JGWEINER

DRAFTED: POL:DBURGER

CLEARED: ECON:ASNOW

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PP RUEHC RUCNRAQ RHEFDIA RUEHAK RUEAIIA RUEKJCS  
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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0985

INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC//USDP:PDUSDP/ISA:EUR/ISA:NESA// PRIORITY

RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// PRIORITY

RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK PRIORITY

RHMFSS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY

RHMFSS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RHMFSS/425ABS IZMIR TU//CC// PRIORITY

RHMFSS/39ABG INCIRLIK AB TU PRIORITY

RUEPGAB/MNF-I C2X BAGHDAD IZ PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000338

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/18/2017

TAGS: PREL MOPS PTER TU IZ

SUBJECT: WHY KIRKUK MATTERS TO TURKEY

Classified By: POL/C Janice G. Weiner for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The future status of Kirkuk is the number one issue in Turkish political debate on Iraq. Policymakers have told us that it is more significant than the PKK problem. Turkish concern is primarily centered on the fear that Kurdish control of Kirkuk will lead to an independent Kurdish state, which in turn will have territorial designs on Turkey's southeast. End summary.

¶2. (C) Given the continuing prominence of the Kirkuk issue in Turkish rhetoric and politics, we thought it would be helpful to spell out Turkish arguments -- both spoken and unspoken -- on the issue. There are several prevailing theories in the Turkish body politic which help explain why Kirkuk is such an important issue. Most of these arguments are not mutually exclusive, and some in Turkey repeat or believe more than one at a time.

"As Goes Kirkuk, So Goes Diyarbakir"

¶3. (C) In this line of reasoning, the oil and political

importance of Kirkuk will provide the Iraqi Kurds the basis for an independent state. Once this is achieved, Iraqi Kurdish leaders will exploit affinities (both ethnic and economic) between Iraqi and Turkish Kurds, drawing Turkey's Kurds into a movement to hive off southeast Turkey to become part of a greater Kurdistan.

¶4. (C) Flaws that we point out in this argument, in particular that Iraqi Kurdistan within its current borders already has significant oil deposits, and that an independent Kurdish state would find it almost impossible to survive without Turkish cooperation, do not seem to penetrate our audience.

¶5. (C) In some versions of this argument, the Iraqi Kurds will use the PKK as a proxy terrorist army to force Turkey to capitulate. This helps to explain for many Turks why the Iraqi Kurds do not act against the PKK in their territory.

"Kirkuk Becoming Part of Iraqi Kurdistan Will Lead to More Violence"

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¶6. (C) GOT leaders and the bureaucracy employ this argument most often. The idea is that the Arab and Turkoman residents in Kirkuk will revolt and resort to terrorism. This argument is bolstered by the apparently rising level of violence in the province, and by reports that JAM and other bad actors are infiltrating Kirkuk in order to fight the Kurds for it. If unconfirmed reports that we have seen -- to the effect that Turkey is secretly arming the Turkomans, who do not have a militia -- are true, this could also become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

"The Kurds Are Oppressing the Turkoman Population"

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¶7. (C) The long version is that Kurdish annexation of the province will lead to a further diminution of the Turkomans, or even to mass killings. This is an especially popular argument among Turkish nationalists. We cannot evaluate the situation on the ground in Kirkuk, but many in Turkey claim that the Iraqi Kurds moved in as many as 600,000 of their own into the province since 2003, dominating the provincial and city governments and squeezing out the Turkomans. All these claims are well-received here and often treated as fact. Some contacts here, however, argue that Turkey's concern for the Iraqi Turkoman community is a conveniently recent development, and that protection of the Turkomans is only a "cover" for trying to frustrate Iraqi Kurdish aspirations.

"It Was Ours"

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¶8. (C) This is most commonly heard in combination with the Turkoman solidarity argument, most often with lines such as "Kirkuk is a Turkoman city." The precursor to the modern Turkish Republic, the Ottoman Empire, controlled Iraq until the end of World War I. Immediately after the war, the dying Ottoman state refused to recognize its loss of Kirkuk, arguing that as the city was majority "Turkish," the principle of self-determination dictated that Ottoman territory should extend there. This residual resentment of "unfair treatment" that Turks believe the Allies visited on them in the aftermath WWI shows itself in many areas that would appear to be unrelated, such as how Turkey deals with its Kurdish citizens and other minorities.

"We Just Don't Want the Kurds to Have It"

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¶9. (C) This argument is rarely stated, but omnipresent. The Iraqi Kurds have clearly identified Kirkuk as a prize. Thus Turkish antipathy toward the Kurds -- protestations that "they are our relatives" to the contrary -- means that Turkey does not want them to have it. The Iraqi Kurds' ascendancy to significant autonomy and relative prosperity niggles at many Turks. When a Turkish diplomat ruefully acknowledged to

us that "northern Iraq looks like Europe and southeast Turkey looks like the Middle East," it was not said with admiration.

Many here are annoyed that the Kurds enjoyed U.S. air protection after the Gulf War under Operations Provide Comfort and Northern Watch (protection made possible by our use of Incirlik Air Base in southern Turkey) and were able to develop their region beyond what the Turks could do in the southeast.

¶10. (C) Standing by and watching Iraqi Kurds reach their goals irks the Turks -- especially those in the military and the state apparatus -- who recall the days when Talabani and Barzani were poor warlords, perhaps more in danger of annihilating each other than of being killed by Saddam Hussein. This bitterness spills over in comments such as when Justice Minister Cicek called Talabani a "bootlicker" last year, and in President Sezer's apparent refusal (despite MFA entreaties) to invite Talabani to Turkey. MFA leaders are fond of putting down Barzani as merely a "tribal leader."

That U.S. officials now address both men as "Mr. President" is hard to swallow here.

But They Need Each Other

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¶11. (C) Perhaps most galling of all in the Turkish mind is the reality that the Iraqi Kurds and the Turks need each other. Ignoring GOT advice, Turkish oil companies have gone ahead and made petroleum deals with the KRG. Turkish businesses have to transit KRG territory to trade with the rest of Iraq. Turkey will benefit from diversifying its energy supply and by serving as a gateway for Iraqi oil to reach European markets. And of course, as Turks remind us, the Iraqi Kurds need Turkey. In the current state of affairs, the Iraqi Kurds have few other palatable choices as trading partners and for getting oil to western markets. The challenge, then, is to keep pushing these uncomfortable partners together, even as the Kirkuk issue pushes them apart.

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